

## A Statement by Hope Meyers

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Program  
Foreign Service Spouse Series

HOPE MACBRIDE MEYERS

Interviewed by: Self

Initial interview date: April 29, 1991

A Statement by Hope Meyers

I'm about to begin an interview, very short one, on the experiences leading up to and including the work of the first-named Ad Hoc Committee on Spouses and later the Research Committee on Spouses. This period of time dates from approximately 1974 through 1976 for most of that period. I am talking at my apartment in Washington, DC., on April 29, 1991.

If this record seems very thin and with little documentation, the reason is first of all because I have given most of my substantive records to FLO or to people who were using them at the time and had need of them. Secondly, because the sequence of events occurred so rapidly that there was very little time or even less energy to put down on any paper the records of meetings that were held, etc. Therefore, this will be a very sketchy record that I am putting together here for the first time. I have done it despite paucity of the substantive material simply because I felt that this was, though a very brief interval, one to which very little attention has been paid so far and certainly the importance of which has been much belittled, I think.

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If 1974 seems like a very early date chronologically compared to other dates that have been given for the beginning of the work of the Ad Hoc Committee, I date it from then because it was during that year that Florence Leonhart, known as “Pidge”, who was then president of the AAFSW, asked me if I would act as liaison between the WAO (Women's Action Organization) and AAFSW. I was delighted to accept her offer because I realized that it would give me for the first time some idea of the work that organization was doing and how it was being accomplished.

It was undoubtedly because I had attended many of those meetings that in the end there was an opportunity to begin the Ad Hoc Committee on Spouses, of which I was one of three co-chairmen; the other two, alas, have gone far afield — one left the Government altogether following her divorce, the other, although continuing her career, I believe, has dropped from my sight and I no longer know how to reach her. I will come to that shortly.

In any case, I began as quickly as I could attending the meetings of the organization to which I had been appointed as liaison. I immediately realized what an extraordinary opportunity had been offered me, because for the first time I realized how important it was that there should be a group of women who were meeting regularly, literally physically inside the Department of State, at an appointed time, with an agenda, and whose membership, most importantly, included people who from prior experience had great knowledge or at least considerable knowledge of how to get things done and to whom to go to accomplish that purpose.

Not only that, of course — all of them were professionals and they dealt with problems in a professional way, i.e., rapidly, with no or very little attention to anything other, in terms of assignment of responsibility than to the person who could best accomplish the job at hand. This led to quick results and a minimum of time spent during meetings discussing how, when, where, why, and so forth. These were all more or less known generally to the membership and measurably facilitated the use of time.

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Therefore, much later, in the spring of 1975 when I was approached by Dorothy Stansbury, who had just finished her term as first president of the WAO (Women's Action Organization), I was delighted to take up the opportunity and offered no objections whatsoever. She asked if I would meet with two other people who represented a different aspect of the spouse population at the time. One was Anna Relph, who at the time was taking a course in women's studies at George Washington University but who planned to do substantive work afterward, possibly outside the Government although her husband was then a Foreign Service Officer. The second was Carmen Williams. She was one of the early "tandem couples" and up to that time the Department had done very little, besides establishing the principle of tandem couples, to follow their careers and to make any attempt to regularize the assignment process regarding tandem couples, nor had it spoken with them as a group on how that group felt about the process was going forward.

So I of course represented the so-called traditional unemployed spouse. I didn't feel myself "traditional" at all but certainly I was "unemployed" at the time. At any rate, a meeting was set using the facilities provided through the auspices of the Women's Action Organization. This meant that the first meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee took place inside the Department and provided easy access to those people both within and outside the Department. Meetings were held at lunch hour and were kept short because the rooms were in great demand and we had very little time to cover our agenda. To my astonishment, having heard by word of mouth or direct solicitation, the first group numbered, surprisingly, about 20 people. This indicated that there were many people other than those immediately present who had an interest in the subject and were perfectly ready to go forward and do whatever was necessary.

We had only a brief meeting on that first occasion, as I recall, but it was agreed that somebody — it turned out to be me — should provide some kind of an agenda for discussion at later meetings which would cover the various possibilities that we, as a group, might begin to look at. Thinking back on this, I realize that many of those in that

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group were already employed in the Department of State in various bureaus and were denominated by that great name of PIT (Part-time, Intermittent, Temporary), which meant that they had a particular interest in bettering their own working conditions. All of them were married to Foreign Service Officers and had in addition the concerns of spouses as spouses quite apart from the fact that they were actively interested and concerned with the matter of employment.

Fortunately, I have copies of the first agenda, I believe, that we used as a basis for discussion. Discussions went on at two-week intervals during a good part of midsummer. The conclusions that we reached were not, certainly, world-shaking but they were of interest perhaps to the record. We concluded that because of the domestic demands on our time — meaning family and so on — as well as professional, our time was so limited that we could not accomplish all that we had wanted or thought we might be able to do. Instead, we decided, I think sensibly, to concentrate on the questions revolving around employment of spouses and the difficulties the Department presented to them in broadening the opportunities open to qualified women whom otherwise it was ignoring both in Washington and overseas.

This led to the misconception that only this question interested the Ad Hoc Committee. It was by no means their only interest. We realized that there were many other problems involving spouses but we simply did not have facilities to tackle those — at least at that time. Suddenly, in early August I had a letter from the office of what was then called Wives Course Deputy, Joan Wilson. Dorothy Stansbury meanwhile had become head of that organization. Joan told me that she had learned that a rather important paper was being prepared at the request of the then Director General of the Foreign Service, Carol Laise, who had become concerned about some of the questions spouses were raising, especially employment; and that if we as a group were to make any impression at all, it was important, indeed vital, that we have some written paper to present for inclusion in development of the paper that would be forwarded to Ambassador Laise.

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I think that within two or three days between us, Carmen Williams and I — many others having left town because of the holiday season — prepared a paper, a copy of which is in the files that I will turn over with this tape. It is not worth going over point by point at this stage because it exists and can be easily read. What was amusing and perhaps indicative was the fact that I, having prepared the paper in its final form, put it together in a way that seemed logical to me but without reference to its form and with particular reference, as my interest, in the substance. I learned later indirectly that the paper was almost rejected because it had not been prepared in the form prescribed by Ambassador Laise's office for papers submitted to her; and that it had been decided with great reluctance to accept the paper as it stood, the points presented being transferred to the proper form, of course.

The fact that a paper prepared by a group of women totally outside the Department's purview should have to adhere to a particular format, struck me as amusing and predictably indicative of the attitude of the people who were dealing with the questions that were our concern. Eventually, however, though with great reluctance, apparently some of the points we raised, though they were considered to be unsubstantiated and, indeed, ad hoc observations, were included in the paper that went to Ambassador Laise.

During this time and subsequently, the president of WAO, a woman from AID named Annette Buckland, and I worked well together because she was interested in the organization as a whole and was quite willing to have a group such as ours, which we had formed spontaneously, work on its own without involving too much the organization of which she was president. We on our side were extremely grateful for all the help that we were given in terms of meeting arrangements, use of facilities within the Department, etc., as well as indications from them of whom to speak to. But we felt that we had no close relationship with the organization, since their concerns quite obviously centered around those who were primarily Officers in the Department and less those of spouses. Many members of their organization were unmarried and concerned about the future of their own careers. The arrangement was very satisfactory and ran smoothly for many months.

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Some considerable time afterwards it was decided that the time had come — and I believe the initiative came originally from Ambassador Laise herself — that a meeting be set up with herself, WAO, AAFSW and the Ad Hoc Committee on Spouses, because through her staff she had become more interested and concerned about the matter of spouse dissatisfaction, and because she was, I think, truly eager to find out more about this. The meeting was to occur in early February 1976.

It took place and included representatives from the organizations I mentioned above. It was rather — I can't say contentious but certainly some questions were raised and one that had not been discussed in any detail at all, namely, the formation within the Department of the so-called "Skills Bank." The idea had been suggested by Cynthia Chard, who had become a member of the Ad Hoc Committee and who was very willing to volunteer enormous amounts of time to setting up the possibility for a computerized list of qualified spouses that would be available to not only the Department in Washington but to posts overseas.

To this Ambassador Laise gave a decided negative, saying that the Department's concern was exclusively employees, i.e., Foreign Service Officers, and could not therefore be extended to spouses under any circumstances. To other questions that were raised she gave less unequivocal answers but to one very definite statement to which the by now renamed Research Committee on Spouses took considerable exception, she pointed out that because of the nature of the group as we were then constituted, we represented, as she said, "nobody in particular," we simply represented a group of people who had a concern. The organization that really represented spouses in the public eye and within the Department was the AAFSW, and since we appeared to have very little relationship with AAFSW, she considered that until that group officially recognized and espoused the concerns that the Research Committee on Spouses was raising, she was not prepared to deal with any of them either as concerns or as an organization.

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In response to that very definite statement, with the help of the new president of WAO I wrote a letter in reply saying that I thought it unfortunate to maintain that only one organization could appropriately represent the concerns of many different groups of people with many different attitudes and points of view, and that I hoped very much that she would change her mind. I never received a reply to that letter, nor did anyone else so far as I know, but the fact that there was no reply was reply enough.

As for the work of the Research Committee on Spouses on a recurrent basis, we decided that the important thing to do was to do what, as far as we were aware, had not been done before: to contact various bureaus and areas in the Department that dealt primarily with matters pertaining or of concern to Foreign Service wives. We began, which may seem odd now, with a meeting with Security (SY). The reason we chose that was because the question of passes for spouses to enter the Department was of particular concern, since many wives — not those employed, of course — had reason to enter the Department fairly often and could only do so by standing in line and waiting for clearance through the security procedure, which consumed a lot of time.

To our, at least my, intense astonishment, SY's reply though delivered with marked politeness and some understanding was that wives were not automatically cleared to enter the Department, as were their husbands upon being cleared for entry into the Foreign Service. When I say this was a great surprise to me, I assume that perhaps others reacted similarly. It never occurred to me before that the Department in investigating the Officer himself would not, perforce, investigate the wife, since she was supposed to be an integral part of the Department's functions and the Department had made statements about "indispensability of wives" as something that was noteworthy and to be taken for granted!

To find, therefore, that in order to be able to obtain a pass to get into the Department, each wife applying for one would have to go through a full field investigation. Not surprisingly, we were informed immediately that this was prohibitively expensive and simply could not be considered. As a result of that meeting we did obtain a mild concession, that those

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persons who, for example, were members of the board of AAFSW or otherwise had reason to enter the Department on a more or less regular basis, would be given a special pass good for only one year and with very limited privileges. That of course was a big step forward but it was not what we had hoped to achieve.

The second matter of concern to us was of course the question of overseas employment, because among other things it involved the value of the Skills Bank. In this guise we met with a representative from the Legal section, a very helpful young man named Shamwell who attempted to explain to us the difficulties of providing the basis for any kind of bilateral negotiation with international entities. We had hoped, of course, that if it were possible for the United States to permit wives of other nations' foreign service officers to find employment here, the same facility might be extended to other countries involved.

It was only very recently that I had this really fully explained to me in writing through the pamphlet, a booklet really, prepared by a member of Georgetown University staff who had suggested that such a book be written dealing with diplomatic immunity. The difficulty, it appeared, lay in the fact that the United States, particularly the U.S., was governed in respect of diplomatic immunity by a very ancient statute called "The Act of Anne" effectuated when the Colonies first established their independence, and it had governed ever since. The Act of Anne contained very, very strict regulations governing the conduct of not only officers representing other countries to the United States but their dependents, and until the Act of Anne could be superseded by a less rigid, less confining set of regulations, it would be impossible for the United States even to consider — which was doubtful from the outset — the possibility of bilateral agreements dealing with dependents of Foreign Service Officers.

We had several meetings with Mr. Shamwell, who was always unfailingly pleasant, as were all the Department Officers with whom we met, and who tried to do what he could to help us understand the nature of the problem even though he himself had grave doubts about how such a matter could be resolved. Meetings such as these were extended to



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other aspects and other bureaus of the Department and it was a matter of great interest to participants that, contrary to what we rather expected, there was no hostility toward the time spent and the questions raised but a real attempt on the part of Department Officers to answer our questions as best they could. I don't say that we agreed by any means to most of the responses and answers that we got, but they were certainly in no way delivered in a hostile manner or in any way querulous, raising that question, "What are wives thinking about?" in other words.

Of course, I don't need to say what has been part of the backdrop, I think, of virtually all of the interviews that have taken place so far on almost any subject, most of the people, in particular in this group, were dealing with family problems of various kinds, some serious, some transitional, but nonetheless the amount of time involved in preparing these meetings, in attending them, and in trying to keep some kind of record of points that were made, proved to be very difficult. And I think that is one thing that many people don't realize was a hindrance to the accomplishments of many of the activities that were undertaken at that particular time and successfully undertaken at that particular time.

All too soon the calendar year was used up and it became necessary to think about what we would do in the future, because we had pretty much established, if negatively, the problems we faced. Meanwhile, we had had added, or from the beginning actually, one of the very lively and dynamic members of the group, Stephanie Kinney, who decided more or less on her own, and very rightly, that it was time that these concerns be brought to the attention of Congress. So, with one or two friends she simply marched up to Capitol Hill after making appointments with some of the more important and pertinent members of Congress, and sat down with them and talked at some length about the matters that were of concern to us and the fact that we felt very strongly that until some of these matters were taken care of officially, the Foreign Service....(End of tape)

MEYERS: (continuing) ... esprit and performance, both, would deteriorate rapidly and continuously over time. As in the case of the administrative people in the Department to

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whom we talked, Stephanie and her friend found the response of members of Congress to be uniformly receptive and hospitable. This raises the very interesting point indirectly, because one of the difficulties that I think the AAFSW encountered was its isolation — self-imposed, I would say, because there were many on the organization's board at that time who were very opposed to moving in any manner or direction that would indicate an “activist” position for the Association. They felt to do so would endanger the organization's tax-free status, and also that it would raise difficulties precisely in the areas in which the Association had at least some interest.

During the time that I was active in the Association, I attempted to change that point of view, even going so far as to write various appropriate persons seeking their advice on this matter. I was assured that there was no reason whatsoever that the Association could not within certain clearly defined bounds take a position and work actively toward it. Nonetheless, the result was as I described it, so that both from the point of view of meetings with members of the administration in the Department and members of Congress on Capitol Hill, the Research Committee on Spouses paved the way for later developments in very tangible way in this context.

Specifically, Stephanie also, by making these contacts, paved the way for later Congressional approval of the Skills Bank and the creation of the Family Liaison Office. I might add that she also did the first survey of wives' concerns about employment, especially overseas of course, thus providing numerical concrete response to Ambassador Laise's statement that the Research Committee was not providing evidence to back up its contention that wives both needed and wanted to work.

On a personal note I should certainly point out that during this course of time Stephanie also took the Foreign Service exam and was accepted as an Officer, and produced a most gorgeous red-haired baby who, after an appropriate lapse of time, often attended the meetings of the Research Committee!

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I think I should digress now to talk a bit about the organization of the Research Committee, which can be covered in a couple of sentences. One: there was no organization. At the first meeting it was clear that somebody had to be the point person and at least do some of the fronting for the Committee. Needless to say, nobody was enthused about doing this and it became clear that, as the person who was least specifically involved professionally or in any other way, I seemed to have the job.

I did undertake to do it to the best of my ability, but when I say “chairman of the Research Committee,” it was really only nominally that I served in that capacity, because there was really very little organization. We kept no minutes, we had no dues or fees, either annual or otherwise. When money was needed, which was rare, to accomplish what we wanted to do, we simply took up a collection and people put into it what they felt they could afford. I must say, however, that my own position as chairman was a very delicate one — not relative to the Research Committee or what we were doing but in relation to AAFSW. At the same time that I was working so actively through and under the auspices of the Women's Action Organization, I was also a very active, perforce, vice president of AAFSW.

This came about because when I used the word “active”, Mary Buell, president of the Association during that year, had many and various responsibilities, some of which took her out of the city from time to time. When I say I was “active” I was indeed very much involved in the AAFSW's work, which many people felt was quite inappropriate. I can understand that view. I responded that the work we should all be doing was such that it didn't make any difference, really, who was doing it or in what capacity it was being handled. That may sound equivocal but I really felt that very strongly, and still do.

I have made it clear, I think, that from the beginning the Research Committee focused its attention and energy on the question of employment of spouses particularly overseas, but because it existed, it became quite naturally the focus for other concerns that were brought to our attention by individuals or groups of individuals. Two of the most important,

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which we were very loath to have to turn down, were (1) the question of compensation for divorced spouses, and (2) the concerns of foreign-born wives. In the end, of course, as is well known, eventually both concerns as well as others brought to our attention were dealt with and resolved in a very interesting way in each case.

I might say here that the AAFSW has rightfully taken considerable credit for the resolution of compensation to divorced spouses. But it should be pointed out for the record, something which very few people realized at the time, that the first interest in this problem came not from members of the AAFSW directly but from the office of Representative Patricia Schroeder, who a long time before had become aware of the problems of divorced spouses and who sponsored legislation that eventually solved the problem not only for Foreign Service wives but also for military wives.

During this very short time certain other things were going on, one of which I should like to highlight. Joan Wilson and I — she then as associate director of what became the Overseas Briefing Center — were increasingly frustrated by the seeming unwillingness and lack of interest in the AAFSW in the kinds of problems that the Research Committee was dealing with. We decided that possibly one way to pump up enthusiasm for this interest that was so lacking was to make a suggestion that in the end proved to be ever more effective than we had assumed it might be. Our proposal was to in some way bring together a very substantial group of women with Foreign Service experience of some kind or other, whether as spouses or through associations with a Foreign Service group.

We therefore proposed what was really not named specifically but would consist of a board of trustees to oversee the work of the AAFSW and attempt to bring some new ideas to bear for the Association's board to consider. I don't need to add that the proposal, sponsored by the Women's Action Organization, the Research Committee, and the Wives Course through Joan, caused a furor. It was seen as we had hoped it might — as an imposition on the authority of the Association. We didn't consider it in that context precisely

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but we did hope that it might encourage the few people then on the Association's board who shared some of our ideas to bring them more forcibly before the general membership.

Elections to the AAFSW's board were scheduled for the spring of 1976, again a rather critical time. I was approached to serve as president but for a variety of reasons I decided that it was unwise for someone who had dealt with these problems that I had been so clearly associated with to run for president at that time. There were other reasons why I declined but that was a principal one. In the event, Lesley Dorman was both nominated and elected president.

The final meeting, a very informal luncheon, of the Research Committee on Spouses was held following the AAFSW election. At that meeting the members discussed for the last time, it having emerged frequently during the year that we had worked together, the possibility of creating yet another women's organization that would deal particularly with questions of employment, etc. but would be a more formal kind of organization than the Research Committee on Spouses. Those who favored this felt that there were many who would join such an organization even though they had not indicated thus far any kind of active interest. I was very opposed to the concept of yet another women's organization on, I think, obvious grounds. It seemed to me that it would be simply misuse of talent and waste of time as well as dispersal of that important element to which Carol Laise had alluded, i.e., in this particular case the importance of one organization rather than many. There was of course a very pertinent reason of the Women's Action Organization, but that was another matter altogether.

In the end some of the more active members of the Research Committee on Spouses joined AAFSW with the hope that in some way, directly or indirectly, they could influence the active work of the organization despite the fact that there seemed to be at that time still so little interest in what we were doing in the first place and so little understanding of our point of view.

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I might say particularly that it is in a sense rather ironic that Lesley Dorman, who had become so closely associated, and rightly so, in retrospect, with AAFSW's accomplishments from that time forward, was initially one of the most ardent opponents of the idea of a Research Committee, of the idea of an overseas board of trustees, and of any need for any change. Lesley, intelligent and energetic as she is, eventually saw the importance of what it was we were doing and became one of the most ardent supporters of every aspect of the accomplishments of the Association thereafter, including most importantly creation of the Forum which produced so many remarkable results including most significantly the Family Liaison Office.

This description of the work of the Research Committee on Spouses that I have given is, I'm afraid, pretty ponderous and pretty straightforward, and certainly lacking in humor and levity! It reminds me of the response that I got to a question that I asked of one of the people I interviewed in the course of the Oral History project. When I asked her, "Did you have fun in the Foreign Service?" she responded, "It was a lot of hard work." Perhaps that response can stand for the way most of us, I think, felt about the work that we did. We were very closely associated, we had some wonderful times, and there was no lack of humor in many directions. But we were concentrated on what we were doing, perforce, because of the brief time that we had to work on what we were trying to achieve. So we didn't really spend much time being humor-ful.

Of course, everyone who speaks the English language in any form or other is familiar with the word "sequel." The sequel naturally to the work of the Research Committee on Spouses was, as I said, the creation of the Forum and all that flowed from their activities. Thanks to a charming word that I credit to a reporter of the Washington Post, where I saw it first, there is not only a sequel as a concept but there is a "prequel." A prequel, as you might assume, is a beginning. Naturally it's a word not known to be acceptable but it's so descriptive somehow of the work of the Research Committee on Spouses that I will call this report "the prequel to the sequel."

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### BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Howard Meyers

Spouse Entered Service:1955Left Service:1977You Entered Service:SameLeft Service:

Status: Spouse of Retiree

Posts: 1956-59London, UK 1959-62Brussels, Belgium US Mission to European  
Communities 1963-69Washington, DC 1970-72Tokyo, Japan 1973-77Washington, DC

Spouse's Position: Political Officer, Specialist political/military affairs

Place/Date of birth: Easton, Pa., August 21, 1917

Maiden Name: Hope Lewis MacBride

Parents (Name, Profession):

John B. MacBride, civil engineer

Martha E. Kugler, teacher

Schools (Prep, University):BA, Douglass College, Rutgers University, New Jersey

MA Public Law, Columbia University

Date/Place of Marriage: New York City, 1943

Profession: Research in politics and economics

Meeting facilitator

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Children:

Elizabeth Hope Meyers (deceased)

Nicholas MacBride Meyers

Volunteer and Paid Positions held:

A. At Post: London - President, Embassy wives Brussels - Board, Belgian American Women's Club; Elected board member of International School Tokyo - Board, International Ladies' Benevolent Society

B. In Washington, DC: First Chairperson, Careers for FS wives; Co-founder and chairperson, Research Committee on Spouses; Vice President, AAFSW 1975; Washington representative Canadian Legislative Visits Program, 1977-82; Jefferson Place Gallery

Honors (Scholastic, FS ): Phi Beta Kappa

End of interview